

Appendix B

Guide to Reciting the Sangháta Sutra

When we recite this text, we are offering our bodies to allow the Sangháta Sutra to manifest in the world in its fullest form: as physical sound, as verbal expression and as mental content.

Reciting the Sangháta Sutra can be seen as an offering to Buddha and to the Sangháta itself, as a form of purification, and as a way to bring all the benefits of the sutra to ourselves and to others who may be within earshot. The Sangháta Sutra can be recited any time and any place, but following some basic guidelines can help make the activity more beneficial and enjoyable.

Some Basic Guidelines

The Sangháta Sutra can be recited in any language. (It is currently available in eleven languages, with more on the way.)

There is no prerequisite for reciting. No initiation, transmission, teachings or permission are required. Anyone can recite at any time.

Recite out loud. The idea in reciting is to reproduce the sutra with our body, speech and mind. For that, reciting requires us to use our vocal chords, even if we recite quietly. However, it is especially important for the sound to be audible if pets or other animals are within earshot. The sutra itself describes vast benefits received by those whose ear the sutra reaches, even without understanding. Lama Zopa Rinpoche explains, “If you don’t read the sutra out loud,

then you're cheating yourself and missing the chance to create the merit of speech."

It is good to place your palms together in prostration while reciting, as you might if Buddha were present addressing you directly. This is especially beneficial to do at those points where the Sangháta describes the benefits of placing palms together in prostration to the Sangháta.

People usually find it most effective to recite the sutra all at once, rather than doing partial recitations or dividing the recitation into different sessions. However, since there are tremendous benefits to reciting even one verse from the Sangháta, when it is not possible to do complete recitations, it is still extremely beneficial to recite when one can, as many pages as one can at each time.

Many people who have recited with others report they find this more powerful than reciting alone. Indeed, the merit generated by group activities far outweighs the merit we can generate individually. When we join with others in positive activities, we all share in the larger pool of merit created through the group action. Thus reciting with friends (or strangers, or 'enemies'!) is highly recommended.

Basic Practice for Reciting (or Reading)

There are specific ways to set the motivation when reciting sutras, and there are also general ways to motivate for any virtuous practice. First, the general: Before you begin reciting, sit quietly, settle your mind, and then let your heart fill with love and compassion towards all other sentient beings. With a wish to be able to offer them all that would bring them peace and lasting happiness, and to take away all their sufferings, make a determination to dedicate your recitation to developing the inner qualities to allow you to do that.

Next, these three contemplations are recommended for whenever you recite teachings of the Buddha in the Mahayana tradition:

1. Think that you are reciting the Sangháta to all the beings in the place where you are, and also to all the beings in the six realms. In fact, we are always surrounded by others, so you can extend your thoughts to all those in the surrounding areas, countries and continents, and visualize that you are reciting directly to them, for their benefit.
2. Think that you are receiving the words directly from the Buddha. Use your imagination to generate a strong sense that the Buddha is actually teaching you the sutra directly.
3. Think that as you hear each word recited, the meaning is actualized in your mind and you gain perfect understanding.

Begin by generating these visualizations, and then as you recite, from time to time you can silently refresh the visualizations.

Colophon:

This guide to recitation was taken from www.sanghatusutra.net. Reprinted with permission. See next section for a more extensive version of this practice from Lama Zopa Rinpoche.

Appendix C

Extensive Practice for Reciting or Reading the Sangháta

Lama Zopa Rinpoche has outlined the following extensive practice, which can be done when either reciting or reading the holy Arya Sangháta Sutra.

Before reciting or reading:

Taking Refuge and Generating Bodhichitta

I go for refuge until I am enlightened
To the Buddha, the Dharma, and the Supreme Assembly.
By my practice of giving and other perfections,
May I become a buddha to benefit all sentient beings. (3x)

Seven-Limb Prayer

Reverently, I prostrate with my body, speech, and mind;
I present clouds of every type of offering, actual and imagined;
I declare all my negative actions accumulated since beginningless time
And rejoice in the merit of all holy and ordinary beings.
Please, remain until the end of cyclic existence
And turn the wheel of Dharma for living beings.
I dedicate my own merits and those of all others to the great
enlightenment.

Short Mandala Offering

This ground, anointed with perfume, strewn with flowers,
 Adorned with Mount Meru, four continents, the sun and the moon:
 I imagine this as a buddha-field and offer it.
 May all living beings enjoy this pure land!

Special Request for the Three Great Purposes

I prostrate and go for refuge to the guru and the Three Precious Gems:
 Please bless my mind. I am requesting you to immediately pacify all
 the wrong conceptions, from incorrect devotion to the guru up to the
 subtle dual view of the white, red, and dark visions, that exist in my
 mind and in the minds of all mother sentient beings.

I am requesting you to immediately generate all the right realizations
 from guru devotion up to enlightenment in my mind and in the
 minds of all mother sentient beings.

I am requesting you to pacify all outer and inner obstacles to actualizing
 the entire graduated path to enlightenment in my mind and in
 the minds of all mother sentient beings. (3x)

IDAM GURU RATNA MANDALAKAM NIRYATAYAMI

Then recite this mantra to multiply the merit of reciting the sutra to
 multiply the merit by a million:

TAYATHA OM DHARE DHARE BENDHARE SVAHA (7x)

While reciting or reading the sutra:

There are two ways to visualize while reading sutras, and both can be
 done at the same time:

Visualize that Buddha is giving you the teaching directly while you read the sutra, and you actualize realizations in your heart while you are reciting.

When reciting, visualize that you are giving the teachings to sentient beings as you read the sutra out loud. Since dogs, cats, birds, spirits, and other beings can hear you as you recite, you can invite the spirits and devas to listen as well. The sutra is medicine for the mind's delusions, where all sufferings come from. When you read the sutra, visualize that you are giving teachings to the beings of all six realms, offering them the opportunity to actualize the path and be liberated from their delusions, defilements, karma and suffering.

As you recite or read, and when you have finished, visualize that you and all beings — the hell beings, animals and so on — are purified by unfathomable numbers of nectar beams coming from unfathomable numbers of bodhisattvas. On this basis, visualize clearly that you and all the beings receiving teachings are generating extraordinary bliss and emptiness.

After you finish:

When you finish reading the sutra, visualize that the sentient beings you have been reciting the sutra to are all liberated from the causes of suffering. Their causes of delusions are purified, and they all become enlightened.

Dedicate the merit, and then rejoice! Reciting sutras for these extensive benefits is how the bodhisattva Samantabhadra practiced, using extensive visualizations.

Colophon:

These instructions come from Lama Zopa Rinpoche, as explained to Venerable Thubten Wongmo in February of 2005. They were edited for publication at www.sanghatasutra.net. Used with permission.

May the kindness of the Buddha, as embodied within this wondrous sutra, fill the hearts of all beings and turn them all to virtue. Just as this Sangháta Sutra has existed for many centuries until now in the world only to benefit, may the Buddhadharma remain for eons more, to bring comfort and aid to all.

May the supreme jewel bodhichitta
That has not arisen, arise and grow;
And may that which has arisen not diminish,
But increase more and more.